

It all began at Marlow

IT took Wycombe Wanderers four qualifying rounds and a first round tie to earn tomorrow's match with Bournemouth and at the start of their cup run, their chances of reaching the second round stage did not look promising.

It all began back in September at the unlikely venue of Marlow F.C. It almost finished there too!

Although full credit should go to the local Athenian League club for a fighting display, Wanderers hardly looked likely to progress much further in the competition in what was probably their worst performance of the season.

They had to struggle through 84 minutes of boring football before Steve Perrin at last ended the agony and put the Blues through to the second qualifying round. Dave Wigley, Marlow's veteran goalkeeper, deserves special mention for a fine display.

In the next round Wycombe faced Southern League Milton Keynes in front of 1,400 people at Loakes Park. After only eight minutes it seemed the spectators were in for a goal feast when the home side went 2-0 up. But once ahead, the Blues seemed content with their lead and the match petered out badly, although Wycombe were safely through. Goalscorers on that day were Keith Searle and Steve Perrin.

One of the most testing ties came in the third qualifying round. This time Wycombe did not have home advantage when they travelled to Chesham on October 19. Winning almost everything in midfield, Wanderers denied United possession and went ahead through Terry Reardon after 24 minutes. Keith Mead got onto the scoresheet with an opportunist goal four minutes into the second half and Keith Searle made it a comfortable 3-0 in the 78th minute. Chesham pulled one back through Tom Johnston but by that time it was too late.

The following Monday's fourth qualifying round draw paired the Blues at home to Margate, at that time fourth in the Southern League Premier Division. This looked likely to be Wycombe's most difficult test — and so it was to prove.

In a match of completely different halves, Wanderers outclassed their opponents for the first 40 minutes. Amidst a host of scoring chances, Howard Kennedy and Tony Horseman made it 2-0. Then a defensive error let in Carl Gilbert at the other end which produced a half time score of 2-1. That goal worked wonders for Margate who dominated much of the second half. Wycombe held out thanks to their defence and also to a goal post which robbed Colin Clewlow of a 35 yard goal in the 85th minute.

And so Wanderers had reached the first round for the second year running. Once again lady luck smiled on them in the draw — another home tie, this time against Cheltenham from Division One of the Southern League.

A penalty apiece by Dave Lewis and Tony Horseman put the sides level at half time but the first five minutes of the second half transformed the game completely. Mick Holifield scored after 47 minutes, then Paul Birdseye ran 45 yards for Wycombe's best goal in the competition to date.

But Cheltenham were not finished, they threw all they had at goalkeeper John Maskell and it was as well for Wanderers that he was in such tremendous form, pulling off half a dozen superb saves.

All that now remains to be seen is if Wycombe Wanderers can break their second round 'bogey'.